Beauties of the Truth

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Numbering Israel

"And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it. And Joab answered, The LORD make his people an hundred times so many more as they be; but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? Why then doth my lord require this thing? Why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel? Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel and came to Jerusalem" (1 Chronicles 21:1-4).

There is a parallel account of this same incident in 2 Samuel 24. The order to number the people of Israel was perhaps one of the most reprehensible acts on the part of King David. In itself, the enumeration of the population to ascertain the number of able-bodied men fit for military service might have been innocent and useful. It was the motive behind this deed which God considered an evil design. The motive quite obviously was David's design to force all the able bodied Israelites into military service with a view to foreign conquests. The design was repugnant to both the internal and external policies of that theocratic government.

In the first verse we read, "And Satan stood up against Israel." David, slacking in his piety and confidence toward God, sought extensions of his dominion without the Divine counsel through the Prophets. He was overcome by his desire to know the strength of his fighting men in his empire. David evidently had begun to covet an extension of his domain and had an eye on certain adjoining weaker neighbors, and sought to unite these with his own.

Through the suggestions of Satan, he gave way to this covetous disposition and ordered his general Joab to carry out this act. Joab was to go through all the tribes of Israel and muster the valiant men that drew the sword. It was to be a general mustering for military statistical purposes.

Joab perceived David's purpose to please himself with an exhibition of the imposing military strength of his people and so he protested the king's desires. The king's order was repulsive to the military commanders themselves. This in itself was quite unusual and strange that the military would not desire such a counting. One would think they would jump at this opportunity to obey the order of the king wholeheartedly. It would have been to their advantage. But Joab, now a general in his latter years, having seen much warfare during his lifetime, saw in this numbering a danger to the people, a danger to their rights, and gave this measure all the opposition that was in his power.

He questioned the venture and then he conveyed to David a moral reproof. He pointed out to the king the ungodly motive of this undertaking. He called David's attention to his haughty overestimation of himself and his people. David wished to glory in the multitude of the people. He who had led Israel to so lofty a height was forgetting himself before the LORD. He had a proud desire to exhibit the splendid array of his nation's military strength as a pledge of the further advance of his house and of his people. To this height David thought he could advance without the counsel of the Almighty. The people, also filled with pride and national conceit of the potential strength, shared in David's sin.

It is noteworthy that a man like Joab, without a living fear of God but with a natural directness and sound practical sense, saw sooner than David how such a sinful exaltation was not becoming to a king of Israel and he was not afraid to tell him so. "Notwithstanding, the king's word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host" (2 Samuel 24:4). Joab assumed the responsibility and began the task reluctantly.

Joab omitted numbering two tribes, Levi and Benjamin. "But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them, for the king's word was abominable to Joab" (1 Chronicles 21:6). Levi was omitted for obvious reasons. This tribe had a legal

IN THIS ISSUE

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exemption from numeration for either political or military objectives because of its selection to minister to the religious affairs of that nation. Benjamin was no doubt omitted because that tribe had been practically annihilated in a civil disturbance some years previous.

THE SIN

In this unwarranted action of David we find lessons of presumption, of not seeking the guidance and instruction of the Lord. It reflected a decline in piety on David's part, by not trusting in God, but in numbers. David's sin consisted of the pride he displayed in his own strength and his forgetfulness of his dependance upon God as in earlier years. He was caught up in a moment of glorying in his kingdom, forgetting the source of how that kingdom had come about. His command to number Israel was an act of impropriety. It showed a reliance upon the flesh rather than upon the spiritual resources of God. He displayed an attitude of covetousness, desiring more land for himself at the expense of the neighboring peoples. But foremost, it was the motive behind this action which was so repugnant to the Heavenly Father.

In the opening verses of our study lie many lessons, all valuable to the David class, those who are God's people. David, a man experienced in fighting the enemies of Israel, illustrated the battles of Christ and the Church while in the flesh against the enemies of God. His experiences foreshadowed the fight in which the Church must engage. We obtain the inference of the typical character of David as representing the Church of the Gospel Age in the scriptural statement that he was "after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22, 1 Samuel 13:14). Likewise is the disposition of the Church. They are also after God's own heart. There is another inference when David prepared for the construction of the temple at Jerusalem. This was typical of the Church of the present time who are likewise preparing themselves and each other as the temple of God.

Taking the lesson of David's failure to consult the Lord's providences for him, we are to first to seek the instruction of the Lord in the affairs of our lives and to pray for his guidance. We are not to lean on our own understanding and preferences as they pertain to our human nature. We must not conclude that because our plans or projects are reverential and designed to be for the glory of God, that they are therefore divinely approved. To do so is to allow pride or vain glory or the desire for self-gratification to actuate us. When this occurs in any measure, it degrades our moral perceptions.

Another lesson is that we should not allow Satan to cause us any doubt regarding our relation to the Heavenly Father and our understanding of the truth. We should not succumb to this temptation as did David. Any one imbued with even a small proportion of the spirit of the world would be more susceptible to Satan's influences. Only with a close, a very close walk with God and a resolute purpose will we be able to continually avoid and resist these undesirable influences about us. If we feel that this overtaking by pride is something that cannot ever happen to us, then we should take heed. David was a great and wise king, beloved of the Father and honored by him, yet even he fell. The previous height of character makes it all the sadder for his decline in piety toward the Creator.

The Word of God must be our daily companion, instructing us through the lessons it contains, such as this one in David's sin of numbering Israel. It will guide us and enable us to keep in the ways of righteousness. For it is not enough that we read the word. It is not enough that we study it, just for the sake of more information or for argument. We must ponder it, feed on it, incorporate its principles as our principles. We should enable this knowledge to mold our thoughts and guide our actions. The word of God should be our energizing and motivating power.

By thus entering into close fellowship with the Father through his word and exercising the privilege of prayer, we will be that much more fortified from being beguiled by the adversary and the influences of the world. We will avoid the pitfalls of presumption and impiety in our relation to the Father. It will give us less desire for a spirit of covetousness or a cause to commit an act of impropriety as did David.

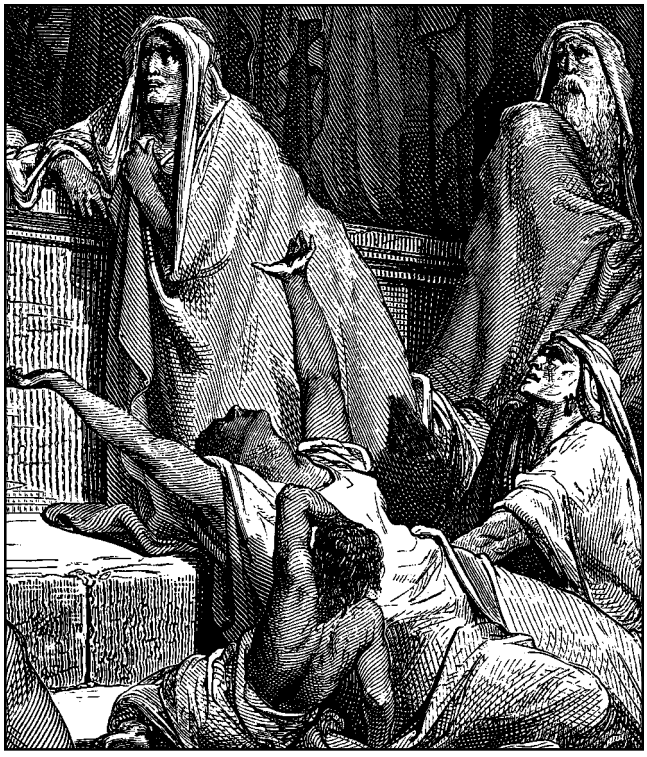
REPENTANCE

We continue with the account in 1 Chronicles 21:5-8 (2 Samuel 24:10). "And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. And all they of Israel were a thousand thousand and an hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah was four hundred threescore and ten thousand men that drew sword. But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: for the king's word was abominable to Joab. And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel. And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing."

After David received the counsel of his generals, there came a deep feeling of compunction into his heart for what he had done. With an anguish of conscience he now realized he had sinned, that his sin was an offence against the Lord. To so recognize a sin or misdeed is most difficult to do. It is the tendency of the fallen human nature, upheld by pride, not to admit our faults or mistakes. The natural human tendency is to let it slide by and somehow soon everyone will forget about it. But the reverse is generally true. They forget about all the good points and remember that one and only questionable fault in an individual that perhaps occurred years and years ago.

We see the true character of King David, who in such a high station of life, admitted that he was indeed wrong. The king's heart was aroused. He recognized the sinfulness of his actions. He now realized that the motive was not pure and pleasing to the Almighty. He confessed the sin and asked for forgiveness. There was true contrition on the part of David. When recognizing the wrong, he went at once for forgiveness and help to the Father.

David's prayers were heard. But there would not be a complete and unconditional forgiveness from the Lord. There would have to be stripes dealt out in accordance with the



The Plague at Jerusalem

Law Covenant which they were under, for that Law had been violated. The root of the sin most likely lay in connection with the expiatory money. For the sin and the sentence was already laid bare in the word of the Law relating to the numbering of the people.

If David's eye had been clear he would have seen in God's Law a special reference to the danger of numbering the people without specific divine authority and direction. For in Exodus 30:12 it is enjoined that in any census taken every Israelite must pay expiatory money. "When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them." By these monies they would be ransomed from the death they would incur by their proud conceit. But even the slightest movement toward national pride is a sin against God. If not vigorously repelled, it involves the entire nation in the judgment of God.

These monies were used for the upkeep and service of the tabernacle and later of the temple. This ordinance was a very important one and was to be considered seriously. This atonement, that is the deliverance of the monies collected for the proper authorities among the Levites, had to be made that there be no plague. This intimates that such a plague, whether it be famine, pestilence, or war could come upon those who had not been atoned.

PUNISHMENT

Through the prophet Gad, David was given a choice between three things: famine, war or pestilence. None of them were very desirable: famine for three years, war for three months or a plague for three days. Here is the familiar triad referenced in many other scriptures. David, realizing his own weakness and now asking in humble submission, declined to make a choice between the three. But with devout wisdom and implicit trust, he put himself and the people into the hand and mercy of Jehovah. "Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel ... David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man" (1 Chronicles 21:10-13).

Israel had fled before their enemies many times. They had suffered the pangs of hunger because of famine on many occasions. They had been through such a famine of three years duration just previous to this incident of the numbering. During their existence as a people, many thousands had been destroyed by pestilence. Sometimes these plagues were sent as a result of national sin. Other times they were for the sins of a few. In this particular instance they would be for the sins of one person, King David. But David's sin, in the eyes of the Lord, was considered a national sin, and hence the national penalty. The people had desired a king. Therefore, whatever that king did, the people were responsible for his actions.

We notice the application of this principle or law in the crucifixion of our Lord, when the people cried, "his blood be upon us." They accepted responsibility for this act and accepted it for their children and all future generations as well. For the Israelites to experience war, famine and pestilence, meant that they in some manner incurred the divine wrath. To the other nations around them, it only meant the ordinary course of events. They were neither protected from the various scourges of the world nor were these death dealing scourges specifically sent upon them, except in particular instances, such as the plague which overtook the army of Sennacherib encamped near Jerusalem.

SEVEN TIMES

One of the warnings of punishment appears in the context of the seven times punishment of Leviticus 26:21-25. "If ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins ... I will bring a sword ... that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy."

If they would walk in the way the Lord desired them to walk, if they walked in the path he had directed them, then they would eat the good of the land. They would have blessing upon their herds and upon their flocks. They would receive abundant harvests. But it was equally a part of this covenant that if they became disobedient to him and walked contrary to that law, they would receive the triad of punish-

ment. They would either fall by the sword, endure pestilence, or they would endure the pangs of famine of various lengths.

The spiritual lesson is that we should always remember that we have been bought with a price. We have been bought with the precious blood of Christ. He has paid our expiatory money, that is, accounting us into his body. He has numbered us with those who are ransomed ahead of the time when all the world will be ransomed. He has counted us as part of the "church of the first born." It is his sacrifice, and not any works we could do, that is the basis of our acceptance to God. For "with his stripes we are healed." No matter how gross or ignorant was our condition before we came to the Lord, no matter how sinful we have been in darkness previously, the merit of that great atonement sacrifice covers all the blemishes and from that moment makes us clean. These previous sins do not cling to us afterwards. We will not be held responsible for them, even though some weakness of the flesh resulting from sin may be with us throughout our lives. The new creature accepted in Christ is counted as being without spot or blemish.

Thus we are to appreciate this standing granted to us as sons of God. It does not mean we can allow our robes of justification to be soiled by contact with the world and the flesh. We are to keep ourselves unspotted from these mundane influences. It is by an appreciation of this standing before God that we enter willingly and obediently into all the good graces of the Creator and seek to cultivate in ourselves the principles of his righteousness.

Under these conditions we have the assurance that we should eat of the good land. These would be the spiritual good things which enhance our development as new creatures. But if we walk contrary to his will, contrary to the direction he shows us, and rebel against him, we will bring on ourselves the triad of punishment. Famine: loss of spiritual nourishment. War: fleeing before our enemies, the world, the flesh and the adversary. Pestilence: the noisy pestilence, the pestilence of destruction, the moral and spiritual pestilence that spreads and makes its victims among those who are ignorant of the truth, that have been unfaithful to it and hence unworthy of it and therefore lack divine protection, subject to the strong influence of error. "So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men" (1 Chronicles 21:14, 2 Samuel 24:15).

In this lesson we have an indication of the severity of God's dealings with his covenant people. Notwithstanding the Lord's repeated expostulations, warnings and punishments, they willfully pursued their king in violation of the vows they had taken nationally. Israel, unlike any other nation in the world, had been brought into a special relationship with God. He chose them as a special people and favored them above all others. He gave them a law, a very extraordinary law, precise in all its details. He raised up for them special judges and prophets. And when they clamored for a king, he gave them kings. He specially guarded and directed them, so far as they submitted to his will, and gave warnings, counseling and chastisement when they became willful and disobedient. In Exodus 19:1-8 we read how Israel as a nation entered into the solemn covenant with the Lord, saying "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do." It was in the fulfillment of this covenant on God's part that the events of this lesson came to pass.

DELIVERANCE

"And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? Even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed ... Let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued" (1 Chronicles 21:15-17).

In the midst of the ravages of the pestilence, David, it seems, stepped out to inquire of the LORD at the old tabernacle at Gibeon (1 Chronicles 21:28-30). But as he progressed to the summit of Mount Moriah, then occupied as a threshing floor, he was met by Ornan, a chief among the Jubusites. Here he saw the destroying angel, sword in hand, ready to continue the destruction of Jerusalem, to slay those in the city as had been done from one end of Palestine to the other. This sight arrested his progress. David and those with him all saw the same angel and they fell on their faces. We know the angel described here and seen by those atop Mount Moriah was but the visual representation of the pestilence fallen on so large a number of Israelites.

Now it stood over the Holy City preparing to complete the destructive work ordained. We have here a strong reminder of the death angel which passed through the land of Egypt and slew the first born of that land at the first Passover. Then there was the angel of death that slew a large segment of the Assyrian armies in the days of Hezekiah. In both of these instances the angel was the messenger or means by which the divine command was executed. A drawn sword in the hand of the angel poised above Jerusalem was a symbol of the judgment about to be carried out. Those who saw this visual representation did so by means of a miracle. There was a manifestation of God's wonderful power.

After a further appeal to Jehovah (verse 17), David received a response from the Heavenly Father through the Prophet Gad. "Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite" (1 Chronicles 21:18).

In obedience to this injunction, the king went forward to negotiate with Ornan the Jebusite for a purchase of this

David Conquering the Ammonites

portion of ground. But the Jubusite chief generously offered it to the king as a gift, together with the oxen which would be used as a sacrifice and his wooden tools or implements for the fire. Ornan's unselfish readiness is shown in the fact that he took for granted that the threshingfloor was to be given to David and does not make mention of it in the negotiation, but offers everything on the place to be used in averting the plague. He had seen the death angel as well. Ornan was bent on staying the death angel as quickly as possible, lest it fall on him and his family. He had faith as well that a sacrifice would suffice to atone for the wrong that had been done. But David refused this generosity and great spirit of sacrifice of a non-Israelite, and made arrangements to pay for this land, the oxen and the implements. "And King David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight" (1 Chronicles 21:24-25).

Mount Moriah, which later became the spot where the temple was erected, now became a meeting place between two princes: David as a king of Israel and Ornan the last of the Canaanites, the last of that race God commanded to be destroyed after Israel entered the land. From this time onward, we cannot discern any further reference to it.

David's raising of the altar for sacrifice of the burnt offerings and peace offerings was to be the harbinger of thousands of typical sacrifices to arise from that very place in the reign of his son Solomon and onward, until their polity ended with the destruction of that temple. His sacrifice having been accepted, God stayed the plague. "And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof" (verse 27). The plague was stopped short of the preordained duration because of the sacrifice, purchased from a Gentile, a Canaanite. It was a sincere sacrifice on the part of David which cost him something, for he refused to accept it as a gift. Apparently the plague was stayed before the expiration of the three days. Notice 2 Samuel 24:16. Here it is intimated that the pestilence lasted a shorter time because of the expiation David made.

The lesson in staying the plague by the use of an animal for sacrifice is that a sincere sacrifice is one that costs us something. David would not offer burnt offerings of that which cost him nothing (1 Chronicles 21:24). This applies to all the consecrated believers. We believe this is the most important lesson to be gleaned from this episode. If one be an elder laboring in the ministry, then the offering made to God should be one that is purchased by many laborious hours of study and preparation. To prepare a lesson hastily is not costing us anything and is not an acceptable sacrifice. The same principle is true of those who may be teachers, whether it be a Berean study or teaching the youngsters. The preparation should be prayerful and scholarly and not merely the empty talk of those who have never looked at the subject prior to the study.

The same principle applies to the students. In order to receive a blessing, they must bring to the meeting something that has cost them time to ferret out in order to be a blessing and encouragement to others and to the one conducting the study. The same principle of sacrifice applies to our other offerings. It should be something that costs us some effort or self denial to obtain, and not simply the overflow of a full cup, which we could give without feeling that we are giving anything at all.

Our whole life is to be a sacrifice to God. Let us see then that we make it a costly sacrifice. Let us grudge no labor. Let us spare no pain. Let us spare no self denial. For the more the sacrifice costs us, the more it will be appreciated by the Lord. We should apply the words of David, "Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God which cost me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24).

If Ornan's offer had been accepted by David, it would be Ornan's sacrifice, and not David's. Nor would it have answered the requirements for turning away the displeasure of the Most High. It was David who sinned and not Ornan. Therefore David had the responsibility to make the sacrifice at his own expense.

Our lesson now concludes with David owning the land which was to be the future site of the temple. It was a remarkable spot in another respect as well. For it was here that Abraham proved his faith in obedience to God by offering up his son Isaac in sacrifice in a figure, for an angel stayed his hand. After David completed all the preparations for the construction of the temple and had assembled all the materials, his son Solomon built this huge and imposing structure. "Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite" (2 Chronicles 3:1).

— John Trzyna, 1974

David's Prayer for Forgiveness

Overview, Psalm 51. "To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba" (Psalm 51, Title).

David's prayer for forgiveness after his sin with Bathsheba is rightly considered a model expression of repentance and plea for forgiveness. It is noteworthy that this Psalm is assigned to the chief musician — as a hymn to be repeatedly sung. There is no attempt to hide or downplay his misdeed, his repentance is both public and, by repetition, enduring. Nor does he wait for his sin to be discovered, but makes his public confession "when Nathan the prophet came unto him," upon the first realization of the enormity of his guilt.

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalms 51:1-7).

SIN AND INIQUITY

In these few verses David uses three different Hebrew words to describe the error of his ways. These are represented by the English words "iniquity," "sin," and "transgression." We demonstrate the distinction in these terms in the chart below.

English	Heb.	Strong No.	Definition
Iniquity	*Avon*	5771	Root: Twist, Distort*
Sin	*Chatah*	2403	Root: To miss [the mark]
Transgression	*Pesha*	6588	Rebellion

** Definition from Brown, Driver, Riggs Lexicon*

From the above definitions we can infer that to sin, to miss the mark as an archer with good intent does not always hit a bull's eye, is to err with no intention of doing wrong; while iniquity, a twisting or distortion of right principles, is more reprehensible.

Verse 5 illustrates a further difference between the words for "sin" and "iniquity." We are "born in sin," but "shapened in iniquity." Behavioral scientists have long recognized that the two vital elements that shape a man's character are heredity and environment. David expresses the same thought. We are born in sin. Genetically the effects of original sin are passed down from one generation to another. But we are shaped in iniquity. Iniquity is not an inherited trait, it is a result of environmental forces.

TRANSGRESSIONS

The third word the Psalmist uses to describe his wrongdoing is "transgression." From the table above we see that the Hebrew word used here suggests rebellion. Rebellion is compared to witchcraft in 1 Samuel 15:23, a passage which Adam Clarke translates "As transgression comes from iniquity, divination from teraphim, and rebellion from stubbornness, so because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee [Saul] from being king."

If this is correct, then transgression is an outgrowth of iniquity. Partial willfulness leads to greater willfulness, which in turn leads to stubbornness and its successor, rebellion.

This reasoning suggests that David recognized three gradations in sin, pleading guilty to all three — inherited sin (*chata,* sin), measurable willfulness (*avon,* iniquity), and stubborn persistence in a wrong course (*pasha,* rebelliousness).

All three are within the forgiving power of God. "Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Exodus 34:7).

ANTIDOTES

The verbs the penitent uses in his prayer as he pleads for remedies for his guilt are also instructive. We will examine ten of these antidotes from Psalm 51.

(1) "Blot out my transgressions" (verse 1)
(2) "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity" (verse 2)
(3) "Cleanse me from my sin" (verse 2)
(4) "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean" (verse 7)
(5) "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow" (verse 7)
(6) "Hide thy face from my sins" (verse 9)
(7) "Blot out my transgression" (verse 9)
(8) "Create in me a clean heart" (verse 10)
(9) "Renew a right spirit within me" (verse 10)
(10) "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness" (verse 14)

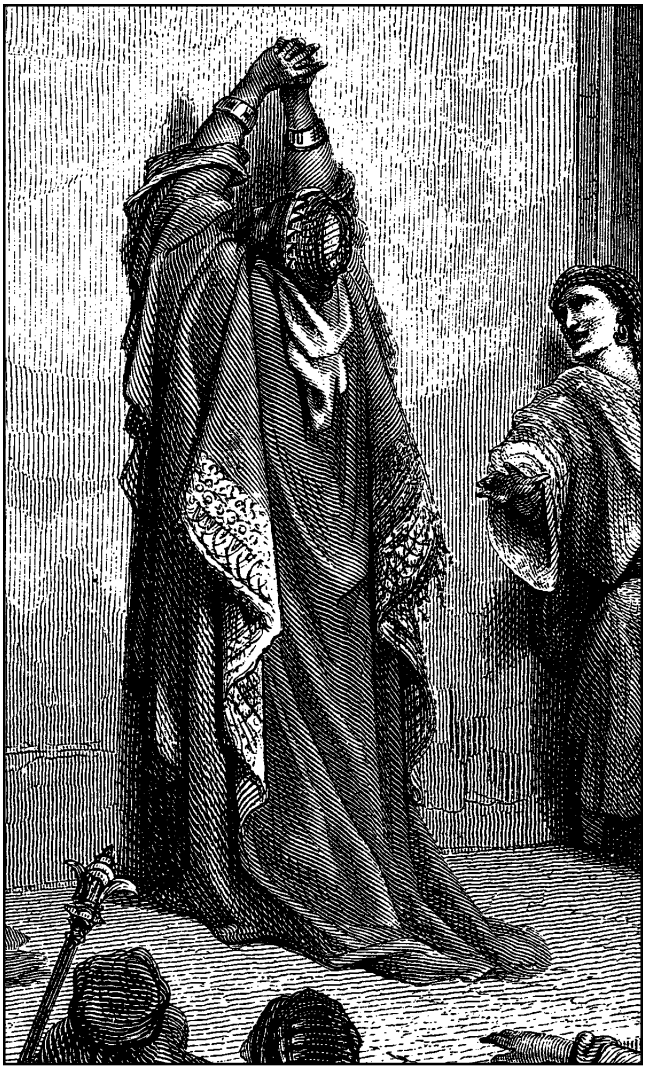
(1) **"Blot Out My Transgressions"** — The allusion is to a charge that is written in a book, as in a court record. He would have these charges removed from the record. This he pleads on the basis of God's mercy and not on the basis of justice. Isaiah 43:25 states, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." It is a plea to God's magnanimity ("for mine own sake") that willfulness can be removed from the annals of the divine court.

(2) **"Wash Me Thoroughly from My Iniquity"** — The Hebrew word for "wash" is *kabac* (Strong's 3526) and liter-

ally means "to whiten." On four occasions it is translated "fuller (dyer)." It would not be inappropriate to render it "bleach."

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia has an interesting description of the cleansing process used by the fuller. "The Syrian indigo dyer still uses a cleaning process closely allied to that pictured on the Egyptian monuments. The unbleached cotton is soaked in water and then sprinkled with the powdered ashes of the *ishnan,* locally called *qali,* and then beaten in heaps on a flat stone either with another stone or with a large wooden paddle. The cloth is washed free from the alkali by small boys treading on it in a running stream or in many changes of clean water (compare *En-rogel,* literally, "foot fountain," but translated also "fuller's fountain" because of the fuller's method of washing their cloth)."

The earliest soaps were powdered ashes, usually vegetable but sometimes also from burnt animals. These ashes were called *qali*, from which we derive our English word alkali, a main ingredient in soap today. Probably from this usage the ashes of the red heifer (Numbers 19:17-19) were used as part of a spiritual cleansing in the Tabernacle.



David's Repentance

The word *ishnan*, used above, is of Indian origin and describes the purification process used by the Sikh community. The Imperial College Union on London, commenting on this purification ritual, states: "The Sikhs are told to clean the body and mind from vices and sins. The Sikh must wash up the body, clean the mind in nectarine stream and bathe the soul in love of God."

Thus David is praying for a thorough (Hebrew, repeated) cleansing by the use of symbolic ashes and repeatedly being trod underfoot — a recognition of the need of chastising experiences to correct him from the error of his ways.

(3) **"Cleanse Me from My Sin"** — One of Professor Strong's definitions for the word translated cleanse (*taher*, Strong's 2891) implies decontamination. Sin is an inherent contaminant. Only the blood of Christ can remove the contaminant of sin. David desires cleansing from the effects of Adamic sin and the chastisements necessary to remove his willfulness.

(4) **"Purge Me with Hyssop"** — Though this is possibly a reference to the ritual cleansing of ancient Israel through the sprinkling of the ashes of the red heifer mixed with burnt hyssop (Numbers 19:1-14), it more likely refers to the cleansing of the leper where the hyssop was used for sprinkling blood on the sick man (Leviticus 14:6, 7). Alternatively, it might be a reference to the first Passover in Egypt, when hyssop was used to sprinkle the door-posts and lintels as protection from the death angel of the last plague preceding the Exodus.

The word "purge" is the Hebrew *chata,* the same word usually translated "sin" or "sin offering." Adam Clarke translates Psalm 51:7, "Thou shalt make a sin offering for me with hyssop." It might be worth noting here that the American Standard Version correctly translates Number 19:9, speaking of the sacrifice of the red heifer, "it is a sin offering."[1] Leviticus 14:13 similarly relates the offering in the cleansing of leper to a sin offering.

The purging which here cleanses evidently refers to the chata of verse 2, alluding to Adamic sin.

(5) **"Wash Me and I Shall Be Whiter Than Snow"** — As in verse 2, the word "wash" is used to describe the thorough washing of the fuller, a whitening or bleaching by the application of an alkaline soap and the trampling under foot to allow the ashes to thoroughly penetrate the pores of the cloth before being rinsed away in cold water. This was not to remove the sin but the concomitant iniquity for which David claimed personal responsibility.

(6) **"Hide Thy Face from My Sins"** — Only the redeeming merit of Christ can cover our Adamic weaknesses from the searching eyes of that divine justice which has "purer eyes than to behold evil" (Habakkuk 1:13).

(7) **"Blot Out My Transgression"** — Recognizing that his own stubborn willfulness had caused him to commit the sin with Bathsheba, he again pleads God's mercy in erasing that shortcoming on the commitment that David would pledge not to become a repeat offender.

(8) **"Create In Me a Clean Heart"** — Mending the heart was not enough, there was the need for a clean heart to be created. Such a spiritual heart transplant can come only at the cost of the death of the old heart. Paul states the principle, as applied to another age, thus: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Galatians 6:15). David knew he could not accomplish this, but that it would need to be created by God alone.

(9) **"Renew a Right Spirit Within Me"** — Here he requests the mending. He once had had a right spirit. He had lost that with his dreadful misdeed. He desired to return to his former spirit and consequent relationship with God. This would require a process in which he would need to cooperate with a determined effort to reform.

(10) **"Deliver Me from Bloodguiltiness"** — Verse 14, in which this expression is found, begins a new section of the Psalm. The writer turns from the sin against Bathsheba to focus on the sin against Uriah, whom David arranged to have killed in battle, hoping to cover up the sin of adultery. Recognizing his guilt for that blood, he throws himself on God's mercy and asks deliverance from that burdening emotion.

Guilt has both a proper and improper place in our lives. This heavy overburdening emotion should, like a weighty load, cause our knees to buckle in prayer. Once it has produced that repentant condition of heart, divine forgiveness must be accepted and the burden laid aside or else we will not be able to rise again. How true it is that "a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again; but the wicked [remaining non-repentant] shall fall into mischief" (Proverbs 24:16).

THE RESULT OF RESTORATION

"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee" (Psalm 51:12, 13). Here is the reason why God permits mistakes in our Christian lives. Lessons learned can become lessons taught. This is the method by which the Church is trained to become teachers with Christ. This is how the Church's part in the sin offering works.

There is great truth in the tale that is told of the conversation between the disciple and his teacher. Disciple: "Tell me, Master, what is the source of your wisdom." Master: "Good choices, by son." Disciple: "And how did you learn to make such good choices." Master: "By experience." Disciple: "And how did you receive such experience." Master: "Bad choices, my son, bad choices."

Solomon phrased it this way: "And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith" (Ecclesiastes 1:13). To which David agrees, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. ... It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Psalm 119:67, 71).

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURAL CONFIRMATION

Three additional scriptures can be cited which imply the same distinction between sin, iniquities, and transgressions. Isaiah 53:5 — "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

It was not Jesus' death, but his wounding, the daily dealing with man's condition, which gave him the necessary empathy to help us overcome our rebelliousness. "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). Likewise, it was his bruising that was especially for our iniquities. The Hebrew *daka,* here translated "bruised," literally means to crush under foot. This is the same process that was used in the ancient cloth washing of the fuller, a term we also noted was for iniquities. Jesus suffered at the hands of iniquitous men so as to understand iniquity and help men to overcome it in his kingdom.

Leviticus 16:21 — "And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness."

In the offering of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement, it was not the sins of Israel that were removed. These had been atoned for by the sin offering of a bullock and a goat. Rather it was the iniquities and the amount of transgression in their sins which were thus taken away. To paraphrase the latter portion of this verse, "confess over him all the partial willful sins and the degree of willfulness in their sinful ways." This work is generally, and we believe correctly, applied by Bible Students to the work of the Great Company, as is implied in our third text:

Ezekiel 44:10 — "The Levites that are gone away far from me, when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; they shall even bear their iniquity."

This text appears to confirm the identification of the scapegoat with the Great Company, for it is generally agreed that this is the class whom the Levites typify. Here, as with the scapegoat, it is not a sin offering, but to erase iniquity that they are to accomplish. The reason is given as well, "because they went far away from me after their idols" (note also Ezekiel 44:15, 48:11).

How often, in each of our lives, we find ourselves guilty of all three — sin, iniquity, and transgression — Adamic weakness, perverse willfulness, and stubborn rebellion. How grateful we are that God has, in Christ, provided a remedy for all three.

— Carl Hagensick

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(1) Calling the red heifer "a sin offering" should not be confused with the sin offering of Leviticus 16. The Apostle Paul specifies those sin offerings in which "the blood was brought into the sanctuary for sin" (Hebrews 13:11). Israel had many sin offerings, but the one on the Day of Atonement was special and unique.